

MOVING TOWARDS AN AIDS-FREE GENERATION

Two Decades of Supporting the Government of Nepal's HIV and AIDS Response

2013 marks the 20th anniversary of USAID's longstanding partnership with the Government of Nepal (GoN) to support the HIV and AIDS response. Two decades of USAID's technical and financial support have pioneered evidence-based interventions that have saved lives and contributed to the health and well-being of People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLHIV). Over time, USAID-funded projects have provided valuable insights on how best to tailor and successfully implement activities to effectively address the epidemic in Nepal. The foundation laid by USAID and partners has contributed greatly to streamlining and standardizing the country's HIV prevention and care programs; improving the reach of treatment activities; and increasing access to quality services for key affected populations.

The first-ever USAID project to work in HIV/AIDS in Nepal, the AIDS Control and Prevention Project I, became a model for future HIV interventions and groundbreaking initiatives in the country. Over the past 20 years, USAID-supported projects under the leadership and guidance of the GoN and in collaboration with multiple national, international and local stakeholders, have built a valuable body of

operational know-how that has improved the ability of programs to reach key affected populations. USAID's projects have translated new technologies and innovative strategies at the global level to real success on the ground in Nepal.

Today, under the umbrella of the Global Health Initiative, USAID remains steadfast in its commitment to achieve an AIDS-free generation by reaching hundreds and thousands of Nepali people with quality, standardized HIV prevention, care, support, and treatment services. USAID's continuous contributions have made real impacts in both preventing new infections in target populations and working to improve the lives of those already living with HIV and the lives of their families as well. To commemorate the contributions that USAID, the GoN, and its partners have made over the past 20 years, USAID has planned a series of special events (check our social media pages for details) to celebrate this legacy as we enter a new decade filled with both great challenges and exciting new opportunities. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank those partners who have helped build USAID's legacy of effective HIV/AIDS programs. Without

support from the GoN, civil society, donors, and academia, countless lives would undoubtedly have been lost and Nepal would never have seen the advances in confronting the epidemic that we have witnessed in recent years. As Nepal commemorates this important anniversary, USAID urges all partners to renew the pledge to remember the lives lost, celebrate the lives saved, and recognize the lives still at risk.

As we reflect upon 20 years of support in the fight against HIV/AIDS, USAID stands committed to investing in evidence-based strategies that will help Nepal to achieve an AIDS-free generation. For, as Secretary of State John Kerry recently stated, "What has been achieved... is a lesson for all of us. And I think it is, in fact, a lesson that people should believe in humanity. To never doubt what we can achieve is one of the lessons of today, to know that we can do the remarkable, that we can find solutions to what seems to be unsolvable, that we can overcome the insurmountable and we can leave politics and ideology at the wayside in order to choose life and possibilities for people everywhere." ■

SNAPSHOT OF USAID-FUNDED HIV/AIDS PROJECTS

Project: AIDS Control and Prevention Project (AIDSCAP) I & 2

Duration: 1993 to 2002

Key Achievements:

- First ever HIV-focused project implemented in Nepal
- Increased the use of condoms among the at-risk populations through behavior change communications and outreach services. For example, the mascot *Dhaaley Dai* (picture) became a well-known character among Nepali households for promoting the use of condoms to prevent HIV and STIs. Similarly, the street drama series "*Guruje Ra Antare*" was much loved by the locals and is known to have greatly expanded knowledge on HIV awareness and condom use
- Helped reduce the rate of sexually transmitted HIV infection in Nepal's Terai region

Project: Nepal Initiative Project

Duration: 2001 to 2002

Key Achievements:

- Conducted multiple studies on behavioral and HIV sero-prevalence throughout the country that assisted in the development of the National Strategy on HIV/AIDS for Nepal 2002-2006
- Pioneered general awareness campaigns for HIV awareness and condom use in the country. At the same time, the project used social marketing approaches to generate demand for condoms

In the past two decades, USAID partnered with key government agencies under the Ministry of Health and Population, and also collaborated with more than 80 local NGO partners, various INGOs, UN agencies, and donors to ensure streamlined HIV programming. Here's a quick look at USAID projects and their key results:

Project: Implementing AIDS Prevention and Care (IMPACT) Project

Duration: 2003 to 2007

Key Achievements:

- Directly contributed to the formulation of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy and Nepal's strategic objectives on reduced fertility among Nepali families
- Implemented appropriate care and support programs to mitigate the impact of the HIV epidemic, established and expanded the continuum of prevention-to-care services by increasing national capacity to manage an effective response to the HIV epidemic

Project: Advancing Surveillance, Policies, Prevention, Care and Support to Fight HIV/AIDS (ASHA) Project

Duration: 2006 to 2011

Key Achievements:

- Implemented groundbreaking initiatives such as **community and home-based care program (CHBC)**; positive prevention (prevention among people living with HIV and AIDS); early infant diagnosis; and community-based Preventing Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) - all for the first time in Nepal
- Secured supplies of HIV related commodities required by the national program through partnerships with other international organizations
- Helped streamline and standardize National HIV programs by providing financial and technical support to the development of policies, guidelines and standard operating procedures (for example, PMTCT guidelines, ART guidelines, CHBC guidelines and training curriculum)
- Introduced innovative approaches such as Web-SMS and GIS technology that increased overall scope of national HIV response in Nepal (*continued under SSP)
- Developed an array of innovative, entertaining and informative materials that were used to raise awareness on HIV and STIs, and promote condom use *

In five years, the ASHA project **reached almost 343,000 people** (female 157,359; male 185,371) through community outreach; approximately 92,000 people with HIV counseling and testing services; almost 11,000 People Living with HIV with clinical and care and support services.

1993 to 2002

2003 to 2007

2006 to 2011



Pioneering general awareness campaigns



Reaching out to at-risk population



USAID's pilot initiatives - Community Home-based Services and Community-based Preventing Mother-to-Child Transmission



Photos: Thomas Kelly

FACTS & FIGURES: HIV EPIDEMIC IN NEPAL

The **first HIV** case in Nepal was **detected in 1988**.

As of December 2012, the reported number of HIV cases, as per the National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, currently stands at **21,551 (13,718 male and 7,817 female)**.

The 2012 national HIV estimates projected approximately **50,288 adults and children in Nepal to be infected with HIV**.

Key populations at **higher risk**: People who inject **drugs**, female **sex workers** and their clients, **migrant workers** and their spouses and men who have **sex with other men**.

(NCASC National Estimates 2012)

ONGOING Project: **Saath-Saath Project (SSP)**

Duration: 2011 to 2016

Goal: To reduce transmission and impact of HIV and AIDS and improve reproductive health among selected most-at-risk populations (MARPs) in a manner that supports the Government of Nepal

Key Achievements to date:

- Working to integrate family planning (FP) into existing HIV services
- Facilitating integration of HIV and FP-related services from government health service sites
- Successfully introduced CHBC program into positive prevention program and vice versa in an effort to ensure continuum of services for PLHIV
- Completed the first-ever baseline survey on Family Planning (FP) including rapid assessment of HIV, STIs and FP situation among migrant couples. The survey results showed limited knowledge and utilization of HIV and FP-related services among male labor migrants and their wives, and called for increased HIV and family planning-related interventions for migrant couples

As the SSP project begins its third year of operations, it has **reached** almost 32,000 people (46% women) with counseling and testing services; approximately 13,500 MARPs (91% women) with STI treatment; almost 146,000 MARPs (39% women) with outreach activities; approximately **7,500 HIV-positive adults and children** with a minimum of one clinical care service.

2011 to 2016



Successful integration of family planning into HIV program



IN CONVERSATION WITH DR. BAL K. SUVEDI

Dr. Bal Krishna Suvedi is the Director of the National Centre for AIDS and STD Control in the Department of Health Services of the Ministry of Health and Population, Government of Nepal. He has served in this capacity since February 2013.



Nepal has received several awards for the success of its innovative health programs. What made that possible?

BKS: For Nepal, we have had tremendous successes with the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4 and MGD 5. The main credit goes to our health workers or service providers who are working directly in the field providing vital medical services. Also, Nepal has managed to develop a system unique to its geographic needs that has ensured health service access for all. The multi-structured health system has provision of health services at the national, regional, district and similar sub units. Nepal also has working policies, plans and strategies in place that monitor the entire health system. The Ministry of Health and Population oversees the entire health system and its leadership has been beneficial in continually ensuring our services are at par with international standards and addresses all health-related epidemics the country might be facing. Lastly, we must credit our successes to our international partners such as USAID who have been key players in strengthening the overall national health system. Working in partnership with the Government of Nepal, their technical and financial support has largely helped address the many health-related challenges faced by our country. We continue to work with them through multiple programs in the country as we progress toward achieving new landmarks in the field of health.

“USAID pioneered and paved the way for HIV programs in Nepal. Since its first ever HIV mitigation program in the 1990s, USAID has continued to support us till date.”

What are your thoughts on the contributions USAID has made over the past 20 years in combating HIV/AIDS in the country?

BKS: USAID has always been a key partner to the Government of Nepal. Even before the HIV epidemic, I recall USAID was one of the first international partners to support the government of Nepal in eradication of Malaria. This was 60 years ago. USAID pioneered and paved the way for HIV programs in Nepal. Since its first ever HIV mitigation program in the 1990s, USAID has continued to support us till date. Their programs have helped strengthen our capacity and now we can say through their support as well as other partners, we are on track to meet our millennium development goal.

With ever evolving public health and science, how will Nepal's HIV/AIDS strategy and programs need to change to meet future challenges?

BKS: We have already seen the HIV scenario evolve over the past 20 years, both in terms of the epidemic and the programs. And, it continues to change. The core emphasis has always been HIV and AIDS prevention but care and support have also become important. Nepal has really come a long way in greatly reducing HIV and AIDS among the key populations such as female sex workers and injecting drug users. But now it is also time to focus on the “other” population, the general population that are at risk as well. For example, the ‘test and treat’ model, which calls for universal testing for HIV as well as treatment with antiretroviral drugs for even those at the earliest stages of the disease, would be an excellent shift for the HIV programs in Nepal in the coming days. We should be willing to adapt to new changes and its demands. Similarly, we need to focus on making it more affordable for all. I wouldn't say we need to go for mass HIV testing or in groups as recommended in recent conferences. Nepal has its own unique challenges that require national discussions and subsequent actions that suit us best. Another hurdle for Nepal that we should focus on is Preventing Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT). This still remains a challenge for us as we struggle to meet our goals in PMTCT. For this, we all need to work together, face the challenges that come our way, and think of better solutions. ■

QUOTES AND TESTIMONIALS



“HIV is not only a public health problem but a development problem. All sectors need to be involved.” - Dr. Laxmi Raj Pathak, Former Director, The National Centre for AIDS and STD Control

“When we started working for the USAID-funded ASHA project in 2006, there were very few discussions about HIV positive children. After the Media Walk campaign led by the ASHA project for policy advocacy and sensitization against HIV and AIDS in the Far West region of Nepal, there was a lot of coverage on this issue. Now even line ministries are working for HIV positive children, which is a huge achievement.” – Gokarna Bhatt, former Chairperson, Conscious Media Forum

“When I went to bury my son on the banks of the Mohna river, no one would lend me a spade to dig the earth. Back then, everybody thought that even sharing a spade transmitted HIV!” - Katte Nepali and his wife from Doti district are living with HIV and are on anti-retroviral medicines. HIV snatched away two of their children. But after availing the prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) service provided by the USAID-funded ASHA Project, they have been blessed with a daughter. She is not infected by HIV.



“At a time when no one was keen to support our work, USAID was the first organization to fund the Blue Diamond Society formed in 2001. This support gave the first safe space for MSM/ITG (Men Who Have Sex With Other Men/Third Gender) in Nepal. This was at a time when the LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, transvestite, and intersex people) community was facing many challenges including violence. The support means a lot for Nepal's LGBTI/MSM community on HIV & AIDS intervention and human rights advocacy.” - Sunil Babu Pant, Director, Blue Diamond Society

“I owe my life to Ram (social mobilizer) and the Thagil Social Development Association (USAID-funded local NGO) who made me understand the perils of HIV, AIDS, and STIs. There are still many other female sex workers around here and whenever I get a chance, I meet them to talk about the health risks. It's never too late to change and that first step will gift you a lifelong of happiness.” - Hikmati, a former sex worker diagnosed with STI, Kailali District

“Her (Community-based Health Worker) regular visits and counseling taught me that HIV was not the end of life but the beginning of a brave new journey.” - Khagisara Neupane, Nawalparasi District



Click to learn more:

1. The National HIV/AIDS Strategy 2011 to 2016
2. USAID's fight against HIV/AIDS worldwide
3. USAID's fight against HIV/AIDS in Nepal
4. National Center for AIDS and STD Control
5. ASHA project reports and studies

